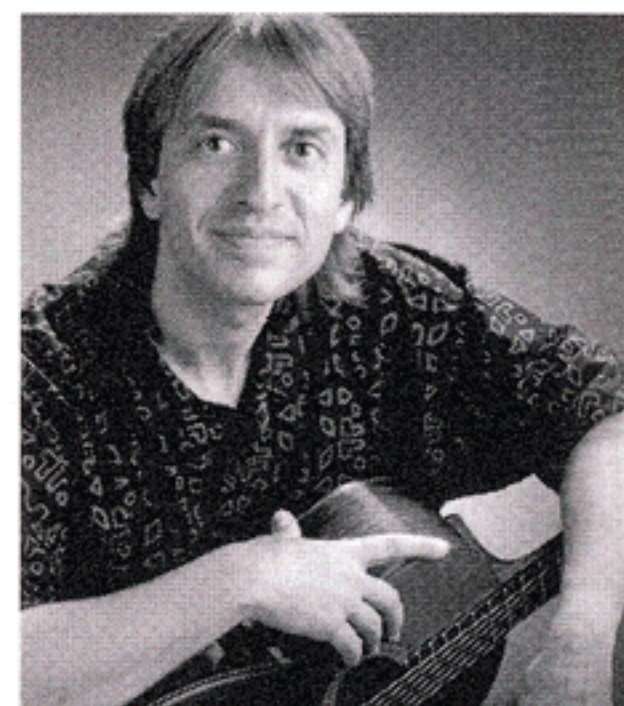


Split-Brain Polymeters

BY DUSAN BOGDANOVIC



HAVE YOU EVER LOST THE DOWNBEAT WHILE JAMMING on some groove and wound up playing another rhythm without the slightest idea of what's going on? Welcome to the world of polychord.

Put simply, polychord is the superposition of two or more diverse meters. Polychord music is played in Africa, the East Mediterranean Levantine region, the Far East, and many other areas throughout the world. Learning to play polychord rhythms will expand your mind and stretch your technique.

Here are some helpful hints for playing a polychord pattern:

- First focus on what feels like the main beat; it's usually expressed in the bass.
- Listen for and feel the second meter within the context of the first.

• Next switch your focus onto the second meter itself.

• Once you've experienced each rhythmic line, alternately shift your focus between them. You'll feel like your mind is operating on two levels.

Ex. 1 (from my book *Polyrhythmic And Polychord Studies*) shows how to decode a complex pattern found in music of the Ewe tribe from Ghana. Start with a two-bar 3/8 over 6/16 rhythm (a). The upper line is three eighth-notes (b), the lower is two dotted eighth-note (c). Try the combined pattern (d). Once you get this going, play the rhythm as a one-bar phrase, subdividing and accenting the upper phrase (e) while keeping the lower in triple-time feel. This yields a 3/4 over 12/16 pattern (f). The

Ex. 1a

T
A
B

2 1 3 1 2 0
0 3 0 2 0

Ex. 1b

Ex. 1c

Ex. 1d

Ex. 1e

Ex. 1f

T
A
B

2 1 2 1 2 1
0 3 0 2 0

Ex. 1g

T
A
B

1 3 0 1 3 0 1 3 0
2 2 0 2 2 0 2 2 0

Ex. 2

T
A
B

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
0 4 0 2 1 2 0 4

Ex. 3


T
A
B

0 2 0 3 1 3
0 0 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 2 2

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last step is to play the actual African pattern (g).

Ex. 4 shows an expanding, then contracting, meter (eighth-notes grouped 2+3+4+5+6+7+8+7+6+5+4+3) in the upper line above a 5/8 odd-meter bass. When you can play this, you're ready to experiment on your own. 

[illegible]